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Women and labour in the Enlightenment. “Atlantic Model” by Campomanes in the Asturian reality

Alberto Morán Corte*, Patricia Suárez Álvarez

*Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain
Universidad de Oviedo, Spain*

Abstract

In his work “*Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular*”, Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes made a distinction between the woman from the South of Spain, who lived in “seclusion, idleness and superstition”, and those from the North that he said “lived generally dedicated to their labour”. About the latter he also noted that they practiced innumerable trades taken into consideration as “mannish” for the period; farmed, took care of livestock, transported goods, sold, spun, and according to the author, in maritime provinces they even fished.

Myth or not, the truth is that the “model” of Atlantic woman that Campomanes represented could be seen in Asturias in the middle of the 18th Century.

This essay aims to present a view of the female professional structure in the Enlightenment. The statistical Century par excellence in the Early Modern, in which analyzing the documentation we will prove how the model of woman described by Campomanes was a reality in Asturias in this period. Although we ignored those economic activities which did in “informal way”, we hope to achieve an important contribution to Women’s History in the Early Modern.

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1. Introduction

The politic, social and economic changes during the Century of the Reason were gradually happening in Europe.

* Alberto Morán Corte.

E-mail address: albertomcorte@gmail.com

Those changes showed a series of debate fields which had been scarcely examined until this moment. Among other debates, the questions as equality of men or the need for economic reforms were addressed in a tangential way. Besides other discussions about women's role in society, their comparison with men and the women's right education were considered. In this way, it was refilled what was called the "Gender Action" by some authors (Franco Rubio 2007: 224), in which men of letters and politicians from different fields participated. From their discussions appeared new female views, which strengthen two archetypes: the aristocrat who took part in the public affairs and the domestic woman.

The ideal of a domestic woman, a good mother and a good wife came up triumphant among the moralistic people of that period. Nevertheless they forgot the third woman who could not go to a communal lounge, nor could she not have an exclusive dedication at home: the woman worker.

In the course of time, in the middle of the 18th Century, and by the hand of the politicians of the Enlightenment who induced for economic and socio-political reasons stood up for incursion of the women into the labour market. Because the period of the Enlightenment looked for productive increase of the country and the increasing worry for eradicating poverty, a new idea of "active woman" appeared, but only in typical trades of her gender (Sarasúa García 1997: 337-371).

Related to this doctrine, the Count of Campomanes presents his ideology in "*Discurso sobre el fomento de la Industria Popular*" and "*Discurso sobre la Educación de los Artesanos y su fomento*", in 1774 and 1774, respectively. They were written with the "intention of banish idleness among the population of the country and other detrimental customs for the economic advance of the population". In the Discourse XVII, "*De las ocupaciones mujerieles a beneficio de las artes*", he considers the inclusion of the woman into the labour market outside the domestic area needs a good education.

He focuses enormously on the textile trades and connected with groceries. He points a series of trades out that only can be performed for women but also they are more appropriate for women than for men. There were some of them the knitting production, embroideries, adornments, buttons set and lace-making, and also the seasoned of food (Campomanes 1774-1775: 271). Besides, it's necessary to be added other activities as the spinning and carding wool. All of those activities were suitable for "*the women forces*" (Campomanes 1774-1775: 266). Thereby, women "*will be able to contribute partly to the common good of the nation, because the current situation deprives them, without their fault, for relying on others their civil nurture*" (Campomanes 1774-1775: 272).

In his reasoning, he accused women from the most of the provinces of the country of idleness and apathy. As he understands it, those qualifying were not for Galician, Asturian, highlanders, from Vizcaya and from Guipúzcoa women. About them, it can be observed that "*they go on boats to fish in the sea; they carry to sell the fresh fish from the harbour to the inland or to the markets, they cultivate the earth by their own: they are shopkeepers, bakers, who knead and sell the bread*" (Campomanes 1774-1775: 262).

Broadly speaking, this model of Atlantic woman was also reflected in the documentation of this period, above all, in the census and land registries, which were written in the Castilian Crown throughout the second half of the 18th Century.

2. Sources, methodology and field of study

In particular, and for the "Principado of Asturias" that is located in the North-Western maritime strip of the Iberian Peninsula, we have used the information from the "*Catastro de Ensenada*". This one was made for the Castilian Crown in 1749-1759 and in which section that was called "Respuestas Particulares" and was dedicated to the collect the socio-professional information about the headship of home. We have collected samples of the female occupations.

Thus, we unload inside the commercial database, names, surnames, occupations, marital status and other data items regarding the relative of the owners. We isolate women who are the field of study in this essay.

The territorial field of this article is circumscribed to centre of the region- Asturias is traditionally divided in three demarcations, East, West and Centre- that in 1753, date of the production of the *Catastro* in the territory, come to 48.9% of the total of the population of the Principado[†].

The most of the examples in which we have sustained our essay correspond to rural field with exception of the parish of Villaviciosa, included in the council with the same name, and the maritime villas of Gijón and Candás. Nevertheless, only in the first case we have been able to work with the “urban” data in an isolated way, because of in *Respuestas Particulares* of the council it is specified to which parish every family headship belong to. In the case of Gijón and Candás, as we will soon seen, we can predict how some of the occupations written down corresponded with the urban field without a doubt.



Fig 1: Noted in the North of the Iberian Peninsula

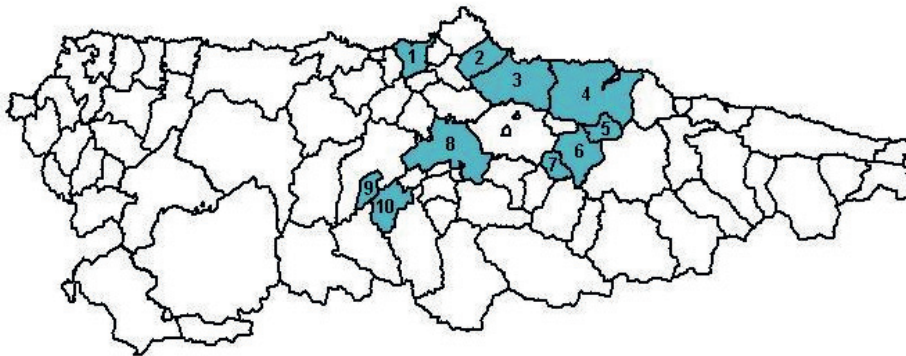


Fig 2: The councils studied are marked on the map according to the current administrative division. 1. Castrillón, 2. Carreño, 3. Gijón, 4. Villaviciosa (in which Coto of Valdediós is contained), 5. Cabranes, 6. Nava (there were there Coto of Castañera), 7. Bimenes, 8. Oviedo, 9. Tameza y 10. Proaza.

[†] Nowadays amongst the 11 council that maintain unless a part of their respective *Respuestas Particulares* of the *Catastro de Ensenada*, we have chosen five places from the coast, six representative samples from the inland and two councils from the mountains. On a small scale, the councils are divided in parishes, and these ones in another smaller place, *cotos*, villages...

3. The women workers from Asturias

If we consider the “silence” about the female work, it’s difficult to quantify it in a real way. As a general norm, the female activities were frequently found in the urban documentation. There are more entries about the female activities in the urban documentation than in the rural documentation, particularly in tax documentation. (Rey Castelaio, Rial García 2009: 102-119).

In this way, the information of the *Catastro de Ensenada*, can bring us to the diverse reality of the Asturian labour structure. It is important to have in mind the rural character of the region. Therefore the most part of the women who worked at that time were female farmworkers. This group is mainly made up of widows, then for single women. Also the married women with absence husbands, called them “the widows of living” appear in documents (Rial García, Rey Castelaio 2008: 91).

This absence of the married women among the payroll of the female farmworkers should not deceive us; though they do not appear in the registry as such, it does not mean that they did not work in farming or agricultural work; it is a response to the fact of only counting their work when it was remunerated. In this respect, Dominguez Martín (1996: 411) points out that, in smallholding areas, as the situation of Asturias was, the women’s participation was far superior to the zones of large estate’s predominance.

Other examples of female professions in the rural field, were those related to bread making and the textile industry. Frequently, these activities were an accompaniment which the women’s country persons used in order to strengthen their depleted subsistence. Among all the situations of documented rural work, the bread making cases represented 29,6% of the total. A common situation that being in the coastal area -Carreño or Gijón- specialized professionals emerged, bakers of corn or *boroñeras*, a specialization that could correspond to the fact that, once the maize was introduced, it would gain ground from the millet, above all in the parish of sea areas and in the valleys near the coast (Anes 1977: 66).

Although the women bakers were not located in the bordering areas with the capital -Coto of Puerto and Council of Tudela- there probably were some women bakers, because since the 15th Century, it was frequent for the women bakers from the small villages to go to the city to sell their products. They were usually welcomed, because thus the inhabitants had another sources of cooked bread. Likewise, the authorities themselves were more permissive with these women bakers, as they could sometimes sell in the public square without controlling the weight of the price of their products (Fernández Álvarez 2008:290).

With regard to bread making, we can consider the trade of women millers as the moment that they would be the “boss of themselves” and as they would have the usufruct of the business (Rial García, Rey Castelaio 2008: 94). Because the trade of miller was considered as one of those “masculine spaces” vetoed for women’s workforce and they gained access to it by their condition as widow. In Carreño, there are two examples of widows heads of the family, one of whom had a young son. The use of the mill brought her more than one hundred reals of profit.

This access to the family business of the widows -and also the “widows of the living”- we can find in other cases studied. An inhabitant from L’Aspra in the Council of Castrillón, who was 28 years old and a widow, appeared as a wine saleswoman, because her husband was in charge of the town bar. There is a clearer example, though in the urban field, of another widow who was 38 years old who took over running a shop. The land registry states she had “in her charge a silverware shop that she had inherited from her husband”, in which she employed a skilled worker.

Another very common trade among the second jobs of the female farmworkers, is that of tobaccoconist, occupation that represented 14% of the total of the rural women who had more than one job. There is a very representative case in the Council of Proaza. In this town, a woman who was in charge of one of the tobaccoconist’s was later abandoned by her husband “husband missing for a long time, his whereabouts not being known”. She started to combine her activity of female farmworker with the occupation of tobaccoconist.

Table 1. More than two rural female jobs.

Trade	%	Status	%
Textile	40,7%	Widows	62,9%
Bakers	29,6%	Single Women	18,5%
Tobacconist	14,8%	Absence Husband	11,1%
Millers	7,4%	Married Women	3,7%
Mule Driver	3,7%	Widow's Sister	3,7%
Bartender	3,7%		

The “textile industry” was another of the occupations which the Asturian women sought in search of additional income. Besides, in almost all the studied fields, there were female farmworkers who combined their household chores with trades as weavers or seamstresses. It seems that the proposals that Campomanes reflected in his work *“Discurso Sobre el Fomento de la Industria Popular”* some years later, had been put into practice to a certain extent. So, there were numerous cases of widows and single women that underpinned their economy with this kind of occupation, which represented 40,7% of the rural women who had more than one job. In the case of widows, they probably saw the trade of weaver as a sign of hope in order to avoid falling into poverty which S. Woolf (1989) referred to. Concerning the single women, specially seamstresses, we could ask if their final goal was not that of forming a dowry. With this dowry they would have more possibility of acces to a profitable marriage. Those possibilities would be reduced once they were over 30 years old (Menéndez González 2006: 54).

We can confirm again the importance of the “textile industry” as a female occupation, either the main occupation or the complementary one, in the urban or semi-urban fields studied: the city of Gijón, the towns of Candás, the administrative center of the Council of Carreño, and Villaviciosa, where the references to the textile works are constant.

More remarkable is the case of four women from Carreño who worked as linen dealers. Those cases are good examples since this occupation used to be practiced by men. There were two widows and two single women, who obtained some profit in accordance with the number of loads that transported from Castilla. They earned from 60 reals for one trip, to 540 for 9 loads of linen.

But the professional female range not finishes here. Among the different activities in which they worked, it is worth emphasizing the case of the women who worked at sousing. Both in Candás and in Gijón it is a trade that was completely practised by women, most of them married (85,7% of the cases). Therefore, this occupation was a possible answer to the search for alternative income for the family. Those families whose head members worked in activities related to the sea in 83,3% of the cases, specially the profession of seamen in 66% of the cases. Besides the income obtained by women who worked in this activity could reach important amounts if they are compared with other “female” salaries. Those income could achieve 1.100 reals per year.

Also connected to the fishing activities, there were the whale fat saleswomen who were married in 50% of the cases. A fact worth mentioning is that those saleswomen or their husbands were in the charge of a shop, with the exception of one woman.

The same the other women, the girls who worked as housemaids were and additional economic support for their households. In most of the cases those professions were taken by daughters of widows and the married women. They were single young women who might see housework as a certain hope to save money for their dowry. However this plan was sometimes thwarted because of the usual practice was not pay their salaries year after year. Yet this practice was sometimes almost “solved” with the bequest, in which particularly the ladies used to be more generous with their housemaids (López Iglesias 1997. Ménendez González 2006: 100-112).

Although those women made up the main women workers, there were more examples that make us to think about the existence of “*pro mujeres*” in Asturias.

In the Council of Gijón, there was a widow who was 52 years old, she developed another of those male activities as the asset administrator of the Marqués de San Esteban. This job brought her an income of 820 reals per years. Are we faced with another example of inherited work? It seems in so case of a woman who ran a drugstore in Los Moros Street in Gijón, but it is true that she obtained limited profit if they are compared with the profit obtained by some druggist of the opposite gender.

Another widow from Gijón was another important jet saleswoman, in which case we cannot talk of wage “discrimination”, because in light of the documentation she earned the same as the other salesmen and she even exceeded some of them 1.460 reals.

In the parish of Villaverde, Villaviciosa, which was a jet center par excellence, there was another widow who earned 600 reals from jet trade. She overcame her male competitor who only obtained 100 reals. The rest of the population, mainly men, worked in manufacture and mineral extraction works. In the coastal Council of Carreño there were another young widow who traded by the sea with the kingdom of Galicia. This was another example of noted women who were workers, but also were in distinguished social levels.

4. Conclusions

Based on the samples presented, we have seen how the attempts by the Enlightenment thought to legalize in order to change female non-remunerative work into remunerative activities. Those attempts had the aim of contributing to the common good of the nation (Sarasúa García 1997: 366) and had already entered into the Asturian society at the same time as the *Catastro de Ensenada* was written.

It is not clear if the women who worked in Asturias in the 18th Century had the virtues that were attributed to the female condition of if they were those energetic women about whom the Count of Laborde said “*They are in charge of cultivating the earth and do it with determination and vigour*” (Mases 2001: 211). Nevertheless, there is evidence of their intelligence and skills in order to manage a silversmith’s shop or trade with jet.

Even though the absence of men was sometimes their reason for choosing the trade, the Asturian women were retail saleswomen, women mule drivers, women tobacconist, women bartenders, women fruit sellers or women sardine workers. In some cases those works complemented their husbands occupations. This fact is noted in “complementary profession” like the trades of miller-woman baker or sailor-women who worked at sousing.

In this, the Asturian women from the Enlightenment overcame the pattern of the “spinning wife”. They contributed to the economy of the period in a visible way and built an archetype of an “Atlantic” women that endures today.

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